United Nations A/71/253

General Assembly

Distr.: General
29 July 2016

Original: English

Seventy-first session
Item 65 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Promotion and protection of the rights of children: promotion and protection of the rights of children

Child, early and forced marriage

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present report provides a summary of progress in efforts to eliminate child, early and forced marriages during the period from April 2014 to May 2016. It provides an overview of developments at the international and regional levels, initiatives concerning the development and enforcement of laws, the formulation of policies and action plans, the engagement of religious and traditional leaders and of men and boys in efforts to eliminate the practice, the empowerment of girls and women, awareness-raising and the implementation of protection measures and services for already married girls. The report also presents an overview of gaps in legislation and policies to address child, early and forced marriages and an assessment of progress and gaps in research on the practice. The report offers some conclusions and recommendations towards ensuring sustained and effective efforts to eliminate child, early and forced marriages.

* A/71/150.

** The present document was submitted late to the conference services without the explanation required under paragraph 8 of General Assembly resolution 53/208 B.

16-13187 (E) 010916

Please recycle

I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted to the General Assembly pursuant to its resolution 69/156, in which it requested the Secretary-General to submit a comprehensive report on progress towards ending child, early and forced marriage worldwide since the issuance of the report of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) of 2 April 2014 (A/HRC/26/22 and Corr.1), with particular emphasis on high-prevalence countries, best practices for programmes aimed at ending the practice and supporting already married women and girls, gaps in research and implementation and legal reforms and policies related to the matter.

2. In November 2015, a request for input for the preparation of the present report was sent to Member States, United Nations bodies, agencies, funds and programmes, civil society and other relevant stakeholders. As at 30 May 2016, responses had been received from 26 States,[1] 13 civil society organizations/individuals,[2] the Commonwealth and the World Health Organization.

3. The report provides a non-exhaustive overview of some of the initiatives that have been undertaken since April 2014. To the extent that information was made available, reference to high-prevalence countries is included.[3] More information can be found in the submissions for the present report, the full text of which is available from www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/Women/WRGS/Pages/Documentation.aspx.

II. Developments at the international and regional levels

4. During the reporting period, United Nations intergovernmental bodies maintained sustained attention to child, early and forced marriages. In addition to General Assembly resolutions 68/148 and 69/156 on child, early and forced marriage, recommendations on the subject were included in, inter alia, Assembly resolutions on the girl child, the rights of the child, trafficking in women and girls and the intensification of efforts to end obstetric fistula.[4] Country-specific resolutions of the Assembly also referred to child, early and forced marriage, for example on Afghanistan, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and Iran (Islamic Republic of).[5] The Economic and Social Council and the Assembly referred to the harmful nature of forced marriage during the adoption of the United Nations

[1] Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Belgium, Burundi, Canada, Cameroon, Germany, Italy, Jordan, Kazakhstan, Lebanon, Mauritania, Mauritius, Oman, Peru, Portugal, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Senegal, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia, United States of America and United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

[2] American Jewish World Service, Center for Reproductive Rights, Centre for Roma Initiatives, Girls Not Brides, Save the Children, National Commission for Lebanese Women, Plan International, Rural Education and Economic Enhancement Programme Kenya, Shabina Begum, Terre des Femmes, Terre des Hommes, Sexual Rights Initiative and Women for Women's Human Rights — New Ways (joint submission).

[3] According to the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), in November 2015, the 20 countries with the highest prevalence rates of child, early and forced marriage were Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, the Central African Republic, Chad, the Dominican Republic, Eritrea, Ethiopia, Guinea, India, Malawi, Mali, Madagascar, Mozambique, Nepal, the Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan and Zambia. See UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2015: Executive Summary* (New York, 2015).

[4] See General Assembly resolutions 69/148, 69/149, 69/157, 70/137 and 70/138.

[5] See General Assembly resolutions 69/188, 69/190, 70/77, 70/172 and 70/173.

Model Strategies and Practical Measures on the Elimination of Violence against Children in the Field of Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice.[6] The Commission on the Status of Women considered the issue of child, early and forced marriage in its 2014, 2015 and 2016 agreed conclusions. In July 2015, the Human Rights Council adopted resolution 29/8 on strengthening efforts to prevent and eliminate child, early and forced marriage. The Council has also made specific references to child, early and forced marriage in its annual resolutions on, inter alia, accelerating efforts to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and the rights of the child: access to justice for children[7] and in country-specific resolutions, for example on Eritrea and Yemen.[8] Moreover, child, early and forced marriage was included as a target in the Sustainable Development Goals under Goal 5, Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.[9]

5. United Nations human rights mechanisms have continued to analyse and provide authoritative guidance on child, early and forced marriage and to make recommendations to States on how to meet their related human rights obligations. In December 2014, the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women and the Committee on the Rights of the Child adopted a joint general recommendation/general comment on harmful practices,[10] which reaffirms child, early and forced marriage as a harmful practice deeply rooted in social attitudes according to which women and girls are regarded as inferior to men and boys on the basis of stereotyped roles. The text provides detailed guidance to States on how to meet their obligations to address harmful practices, including child, early and forced marriage, under the two Conventions. The Human Rights Committee, the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the Committee against Torture have also issued recommendations in their concluding observations to States parties on specific measures that States must take to address child, early and forced marriage and to ensure the rights of already married women and girls.[11] The Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, in its general comment No. 22 on the right to sexual and reproductive health (E/C.12/GC/22), stresses States' obligations to shield all individuals from harmful practices and norms and gender-based violence that deny them their full sexual and reproductive health, including child and forced marriage. General recommendation No. 32 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women on gender-related dimensions of refugee status, asylum, nationality and statelessness of women (CEDAW/C/GC/32) also refers to child, early and forced marriage as a gender-related form of persecution and legitimate grounds for international protection. General recommendation No. 34 of

[6] See Economic and Social Council resolution 2014/18 and General Assembly resolution 69/194.

[7] See Human Rights Council resolutions 26/15, 32/28 and 25/6.

[8] See Human Rights Council resolutions 26/24 and 27/19.

[9] The inclusion of target 5.3, Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation, reaffirms that child, early and forced marriage is a form of gender-based discrimination that disproportionately affects women and girls.

[10] Joint general recommendation No. 31 of the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women/general comment No. 18 of the Committee on the Rights of the Child on harmful practices (CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18).

[11] See CCPR/C/MWI/CO/1/Add.1, CCPR/C/NPL/CO/2, CCPR/C/SLE/CO/1, CCPR/C/DOM/CO/5/Add.1, CCPR/C/GEO/CO/4, CCPR/C/JPN/CO/6, CCPR/C/MNE/CO/1, CCPR/C/UZB/CO/4 and CCPR/C/BDI/CO/2; CERD/C/IRQ/CO/15-21 and CERD/C/MKD/CO/8-10; E/C.12/IDN/CO/1 and E/C.12/UZB/CO/2; CAT/C/MRT/CO/1.

the Committee on the rights of rural women also details steps to be taken to prevent and prohibit child and/or forced marriage among rural women and girls.[12]

6. In his most recent thematic report (A/HRC/31/57), the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment noted that child and forced marriage was a form of gender-based violence that could constitute ill-treatment and torture. The Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of slavery, including its causes and its consequences, has described child marriage as a form of forced marriage that places children at high risk of child servitude and other slavery-like practices and can in certain cases constitute slavery.[13] The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, in his interim report (A/68/290), drew attention to the fact that, in a number of countries, women or girls from religious minorities run the risk of being abducted with the purpose of forcing them to convert to mainstream religion, often in connection with a forced marriage. The Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, the Special Rapporteur on the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health and the Working Group on the issue of discrimination against women in law and in practice have also made specific references to child, early and forced marriage in country visits and in their recommendations to States.[14] The Working Group also released a report that addressed the issue of discrimination against women with regard to health and safety and discussed child, early and forced marriage in the context of harmful practices.[15] The Special Rapporteur on the right to health submitted a report on adolescents that referred to child marriage in the context of gender inequality and the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights.[16] The issue of child, early and forced marriage has also been raised in the context of the universal periodic review with recommendations focusing on the importance of raising the minimum age of marriage to 18 years, developing comprehensive action plans and carrying out awareness-raising campaigns on the issue.[17]

7. Regional organizations have also increased efforts to address child, early and forced marriage. The African Union, through its 2014 regional campaign to end child marriage, has supported national campaigns and national action plans to end the practice. In rolling out its campaign, the organization appointed a Goodwill Ambassador and, in November 2015, organized the First African Girls' Summit on Ending Child Marriage in Africa. In July 2014, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in its resolution 292, tasked the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa with conducting a study on child marriages in 10 countries, including in the high-prevalence countries of Malawi, Mali and Mozambique. The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child are also in the process of developing a joint general comment on article 6 of the Maputo Protocol/article 21 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights with a focus on child, early and forced

[12] CEDAW/C/GC/34, paras. 5, 22, 32, 34, 42 and 43.

[13] A/HRC/27/53, para. 28.

[14] For example, Afghanistan, Guatemala, Pakistan and Yemen.

[15] A/HRC/32/44, paras. 34, 56 and 105 (d) (i).

[16] A/HRC/32/32, paras. 14, 36, 39 and 84.

[17] For example, see Bhutan (A/HRC/27/8), Guinea (A/HRC/29/6), Guinea-Bissau (A/HRC/29/12), Kenya (A/HRC/29/10), Kuwait (A/HRC/29/17), Lesotho (A/HRC/29/9), Liberia (A/HRC/30/4), Madagascar (A/HRC/28/13), Malawi (A/HRC/30/5), Turkey (A/HRC/29/15) and Yemen (A/HRC/26/8).

marriage. In October 2014, the Committee appointed a Special Rapporteur of the African Union on Child Marriage.

8. In August 2014, the South Asia Initiative to End Violence against Children, an intergovernmental apex body of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, adopted the Regional Action Plan to End Child Marriage in South Asia (2015-2018). The Regional Action Plan, which includes seven expected outcomes, recognizes child marriage as a regional human rights concern and declares putting an end to the practice a regional priority. In November 2014, States members of the Initiative[18] adopted the Kathmandu Call for Action to End Child Marriage in South Asia, in which they committed to taking 12 actions as a means towards ending child marriage.

9. In August 2014, the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) entered into force. The Istanbul Convention acknowledges forced marriage as a serious human rights violation and a major impediment to the achievement of gender equality. As part of its Action Plan on Human Rights and Democracy 2015-2019, the European Union is focusing on the prevention of child, early and forced marriage as one of the key elements of the realization of human rights.

III. Legislative measures and enforcement of legislation

10. The OHCHR report on child, early and forced marriage highlighted that, in 2014, 147 countries still permitted children below the age of 18 to be married, of which 54 allowed girls to marry at a younger age than boys. It also stressed that marriage provisions in plural legal systems were often inconsistent with international obligations.[19]

11. Since the issuance of the OHCHR report, some States have reported efforts to strengthen the legal framework to prevent and address child, early and forced marriage. For example, in 2015, Togo adopted a new criminal code criminalizing child and forced marriage. The country also adopted Act No. 2009-010 to ensure systematic birth registration. In 2015, Nepal introduced a legal ban on child marriage. In 2015, Chad raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years for both girls and boys for all marriages, whether civil, religious or traditional, and made child marriage a punishable offence.[20] In November 2015, Guatemala introduced the minimum age of marriage of 18 years for both girls and boys, and in July 2015, Spain raised the minimum age of marriage from 14 to 16 years for both girls and boys. In June 2015, amendments to the Canada Civil Marriage Act entered into force, setting the absolute minimum age of marriage at 16 years, without exceptions. The law is also applicable to children below the age of 16 who are resident in Canada, regardless of the purported location of the marriage ceremony.

[18] Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. See the submission from the Center for Reproductive Rights.

[19] A/HRC/26/22, para. 42.

[20] United Nations Population Fund, "Chad: national campaign to end child marriage takes off", 24 March 2015. Available from http://reliefweb.int/report/chad/chad-national-campaign-end-child-marriage-takes.

12. The Marriage, Divorce and Family Relations Act of 2015 of Malawi sets the minimum age of marriage at 18 years. However, the new law does not supersede the relevant provision of the country's Constitution, which sets the minimum age of marriage at 15 years, with parental consent. In April 2014, Morocco repealed an article in its penal code that allowed rapists to avoid prosecution if they married the victim. In its combined sixth and seventh periodic reports to the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW/C/MLI/6-7), Mali reported that it had introduced several amendments to its criminal code, which henceforth imposes a criminal penalty for civil registry officials who perform early marriage. Guinea, during its universal periodic review in April 2015, reported that it had taken steps to reform discriminatory legislation against women, including harmonization of its laws with the Convention on the Rights of the Child.[21]

13. In 2015, Portugal adopted Law No. 83/2015, which criminalizes forced marriage, and Slovenia introduced a new criminal offence of "forced marriage or a similar union" punishable with up to five years' imprisonment in its criminal code. The Antisocial Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 of the United Kingdom makes the use of violence, threats, deception or any other form of coercion for the purpose of forcing a person into marriage in England and Wales or into leaving the United Kingdom with the intention of forcing that person to marry a criminal offence. It also criminalizes breaches of a Forced Marriage Protection Order.[22]

14. In March 2015, parliamentarians from 79 countries joined forces through the Global Parliamentary Campaign to End Child, Early and Forced Marriage to work towards ending the practice at the national level.[23] At the time of writing, the Southern African Development Community (SADC) was drafting a model law on child, early and forced marriage with support from the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Plan International and the Southern Africa Litigation Centre.

15. National courts are increasingly adjudicating cases of child, early and forced marriage. In March 2015, the Madras High Court in the Indian State of Tamil Nadu ruled in two separate cases that marriages of children under Muslim personal law were in violation of the Constitution of India. In the first case (*Mohammad Abbas v. Chief Secretary*), the petitioner filed a public interest litigation petition requesting the Government's non-interference in the marriage of a young girl by her parents, as it was valid under Muslim personal law. The Madras High Court denied the petition, stating that the performance of child marriage was not protected by the right to freedom of religion under the Constitution of India but rather amounted to a violation of the girl's fundamental rights as enshrined in the Constitution. In the second case (*Abdul Khader v. K. Pechiammal*), the Court ruled in favour of an officer who was seeking an injunction against the marriage of a 15-year-old girl. The petitioner had claimed that the marriage would be valid under Muslim personal laws. Three other Indian state high courts, the Gujarat High Court, the Kolkata High Court and the Punjab and Haryana High Court, have also since issued rulings consistent with the Madras High Court's decision in *Mohammad Abbas v. Chief*

[21] See A/HRC/29/6.

[22] A/HRC/26/22, para. 26.

[23] See Parliamentarians for Global Action, "Global parliamentary declaration to end child, early and forced marriage and list of signatories", 4 March 2015. Available from www.pgaction.org/campaigns/cefm/declaration-to-end-child-early-and-forced-marriage.html.

Secretary, finding that even where child marriages were "self-initiated" they were voidable under the Prohibition of Child Marriage Act, 2006.

16. On 20 January 2016, the Constitutional Court of Zimbabwe declared section 22 of the Marriage Act unconstitutional for allowing marriage under 18 years of age and ruled that "no person, male or female, in Zimbabwe may enter into any marriage, including an unregistered customary law union or any other union, including one arising out of religion or a religious rite, before attaining the age of 18".[24]

17. At the time of writing, a court in Mozambique was hearing cases of child marriage within the Johane Marangue sect after three girls below the age of 14 years filed suits, contesting their marriages.[25]

18. Following the rejection by the Pakistani Parliamentary Standing Committee on Religious Affairs and Interfaith Harmony of a 2015 bill to increase the minimum legal age of marriage to 18 years and to strengthen penalties for child, early and forced marriage, legislatures in the Pakistani Sindh province adopted the Child Marriage Restraint Act, which raised the minimum age of marriage to 18 years and imposed penalties for child, early and forced marriage. In 2015, Punjab province legislatures strengthened penalties for child marriage.

IV. Policies and action plans

19. The OHCHR report highlighted the need for comprehensive and coordinated approaches to effectively address child, early and forced marriage. In paragraph 53 of the report, it was recommended that national policies and strategies be developed with the involvement of relevant government departments at the national and local levels.

20. During the period covered by the present report, Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mali, the Niger and Zimbabwe all launched the aforementioned campaign to end child marriage, which requires the development of national action plans to end the practice.[26] Globally, more than 40 countries are working with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) to include initiatives to end child, early and forced marriage in their domestic programmes; of those, 18 have adopted national strategies. In 2015, Mozambique adopted a national strategy on child, early and forced marriage for 2015-2019, which involves five ministries under the leadership of the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Affairs. Mauritania has put in place a multisectoral committee for the elaboration and monitoring of a plan for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage, with representatives of the ministries handling the social affairs, children and family, justice, health, education, Islamic affairs and communication portfolios, as well as United Nations entities and civil society organizations. Togo reported on the elaboration of a programme to eradicate adolescent pregnancies and early marriages.

[24] Veritas, "Constitution watch 4/2016: Veritas wins court case against child marriage — Constitutional Court decides marriage under 18 unconstitutional", 20 January 2016. Available from www.veritaszim.net/node/1558.

[25] Arnaldo Vieira, "Mozambique cracks down on child marriage sect", 18 November 2015. Available from www.africareview.com/News/Mozambique-cracks-down-on-child-marriage-sect/-/979180/2961326/-/jel56gz/-/index.html.

[26] See http://pages.au.int/cecm.

21. Following its commitment at the Girl Summit in London in June 2014, the Government of Nepal has developed a draft national strategy to end child marriage, which is expected to be adopted later in 2016. In 2014, the National Population Council of Egypt launched a five-year national strategy to prevent child marriage, which aims to reduce child marriage by 50 per cent. Following the adoption of the Federal Act on Measures against Forced Marriages, Switzerland has embarked on a five-year (2013-2017) programme against forced marriage aimed at establishing services for affected women and girls throughout Switzerland and strengthening cooperation among experts in this field. The new Strategy for the Social Inclusion of Roma in Serbia for 2016-2025 lays down measures to reduce the number of juvenile and forced marriages and juvenile pregnancies in the Roma community.

22. Several countries have integrated the issue of child, early and forced marriage in their existing programmes on violence against women, on harmful practices or more broadly on the prevention of gender-based violence. For instance, Canada has established the Interdepartmental Working Group on Early and Forced Marriage, Honour-based Violence and Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting, which includes 14 departments, agencies and crown corporations. The national action plan of Belgium against all forms of gender-based violence contains 235 measures, including an end to forced marriages. The National Plan of Action for Children and Adolescents (2012-2021) of Peru includes expected result 9, Adolescents will postpone maternity and paternity until they reach adulthood.

23. International and regional cooperation has also increasingly focused on the promotion of plans and initiatives against child, early and forced marriage. In July 2014, UNICEF and UNFPA announced the creation of the Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage in more than 10 countries with medium to high prevalence rates.[27] The United States reported that the Department of State was embarking on a new $1 million programme in one or more of the neighbouring countries of the Syrian Arab Republic affected by the Syrian refugee crisis to help to prevent and respond to early and forced marriage. These efforts will focus on the training of caregivers, religious leaders and community stakeholders and support to civil society organizations and other actors working on protecting at-risk girls and providing services to married girls.

24. In 2015, Commonwealth countries adopted the Kigali Declaration, which sets out a framework for action by national human rights institutions on child, early and forced marriage. To date, 20 countries, including a number of high-prevalence countries, have signed the Declaration.[28] In the Caribbean context, the Commonwealth has been actively working on the issue through its work on gender-based violence, sexual exploitation and empowerment.

[27] The Global Programme to Accelerate Action to End Child Marriage has received commitments amounting to more than $80 million from the Governments of Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the United Kingdom. Countries of focus include Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Ethiopia, Ghana, India, Mozambique, Nepal, the Niger, Sierra Leone, Yemen and Zambia.

[28] Signatories include Bangladesh, Botswana, Cameroon, India, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, Maldives, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sri Lanka, Uganda and the United Republic of Tanzania.

V. Engagement of religious, traditional and community leaders and of men and boys

25. The OHCHR report recommends the involvement of religious, traditional and community leaders and the engagement of men and boys in efforts to address widespread cultural and social acceptance of child, early and forced marriage.

26. In 2014, the Zimbabwean National Chiefs Council announced its commitment to ending child marriage. In Malawi, Plan International, as part of its 18+ Programme, has trained traditional and religious leaders on the importance of addressing child, early and forced marriage. The Programme has also facilitated peer exchange and learning processes for chiefs from SADC. In the Dedza district, in the Central Region of Malawi, Senior Chief Inkosi Kachindamoto has reportedly annulled hundreds of customary child marriages and encouraged children to go back to school.[29] The Commonwealth has supported the mobilization of traditional chiefs, young men and young women survivors of child, early and forced marriage in Malawi. At present, a caucus of Chiefs works to mobilize traditional leaders and structures to end child marriage in rural communities. A network of young men was also established, which has taken forward advocacy in several rural districts in schools, universities, churches and communities to end child marriage.

27. In Nigeria, Save the Children has engaged men, religious and community leaders as active partners of change, through awareness-raising activities. Similarly, in the United Republic of Tanzania, Save the Children, jointly with local civil society organizations, has developed the Baba Bora ("good father") Campaign, which focuses on stronger male engagement in fighting violence against children, including child, early and forced marriage.

28. In April 2013, the Government of Zambia initiated a three-year national campaign to end child marriage. The campaign includes activities to empower traditional leaders to become champions and agents of change in their chiefdoms and to amend relevant laws and policies to ensure that girls are legally protected from child marriage.

29. The Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family of Cameroon signed an agreement with the Council of Imams and Muslim Dignitaries of Cameroon to jointly address child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices.

VI. Access to education and empowerment of girls and women

30. Promoting girls' access to high-quality education, in accordance with relevant international standards, and promoting women's economic empowerment and access to productive resources are key strategies to prevent child, early and forced marriage.

31. In Zimbabwe, Plan International's Building Skills for Life Programme pays for schooling and education materials for out-of-school girls to enable them to re-enter the education system. The organization supports the Government's Second

[29] United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, "Malawi Chief annuls 330 child marriages", 17 September 2015. Available from www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2015/9/malawi-chief-annuls-330-child-marriages.

Chance Education Policy, aimed at improving the quality of education in schools through the introduction of adolescent sexual and reproductive health education, the creation of girls' empowerment clubs and the strengthening of school-based child protection systems. The majority of girls in the programme have re-entered the formal education system and are currently acting as mentors to younger girls.

32. In the United Republic of Tanzania, Plan International and the Small Industries Development Organization have trained girls (aged 15-24), particularly those out of school and particularly at risk of forced marriage, in livelihood skills and entrepreneurship with a view to enabling them to open and run a business. Save the Children also supports girls' empowerment programmes in South Sudan.

33. Save the Children provides reproductive health services and educational and vocational skills training for girls in Somaliland who are at risk of child, early and forced marriage or living in such marriages. In Nigeria, the organization is supporting vocational programmes for girls and capacity-building of female members of the Children's Parliament. Zambia has instituted two new programmes aimed at ending child, early and forced marriage, Girls' Education and Women's Empowerment and Livelihoods, and Women at Work. In Malawi, the Ministry of Health, UNICEF and local civil society organizations have organized sex education campaigns inside and outside schools, with access to modern contraceptives.

34. Several countries have devoted substantial resources either bilaterally or through technical assistance to promote girls' education and empowerment and prevent child, early and forced marriage. For example, in July 2015, Canada announced a $20 million contribution to a project on child, early and forced marriage with UNFPA aimed at access to health information and services, education and life skills training for adolescent girls. Also in July 2015, Canada announced a $2.3 million contribution to a project to end child, early and forced marriage in Commonwealth countries through open learning and distance education. Germany, through its Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) is supporting educational efforts including on sexual and reproductive health to reduce child, early and forced marriage in Guinea, Indonesia and Malawi. The United Kingdom is funding the Finote Hiwot programme in Ethiopia. The programme targets girls and boys through in-school activities, including girls' clubs, mentoring, school materials and incentives for girls at risk. The project has reportedly reached at least 37,500 adolescent girls. The United States Agency for International Development in 2015 provided health care and access to education for married children and adolescents and educated students, teachers, parents and community leaders through its Safe Schools programme in Nepal.

35. In March 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNFPA and the World Bank announced a joint initiative, Empowering Adolescent Girls and Young Women through Education,[30] aimed at averting child marriage and early pregnancy in 20 countries.

[30] UNESCO, "Closing gender gap in education", 11 March 2015. Available from http://en.unesco.org/news/closing-gender-gap-education-0. The joint programme will be implemented in 20 countries, including Mali, Nepal, the Niger, Pakistan and South Sudan.

VII. Awareness-raising

36. The OHCHR report stressed the importance of addressing the widespread cultural and social acceptance of child, early and forced marriage, including by raising awareness of its harm to the victims and the costs to society at large.

37. A number of countries have used the press, television, radio, books and social media to raise awareness of the impact of these harmful practices, transform societal norms and empower and equip girls with the information and skills to say "no" to marriage. For instance, the State Committee for Family, Women and Children Affairs in Azerbaijan, in collaboration with UNFPA, has organized several television and radio programmes on child, early and forced marriage and awareness-raising campaigns in schools on topics related to early marriages, girls' access to education and reproductive health. In August 2014, the country launched the "Be for the healthy lifestyle: say no to early marriages" campaign. In Zimbabwe, Plan International is using radio programmes and social media to raise awareness of the harmful impact of child, early and forced marriage, and in Pakistan, it has organized 107 interactive theatre and art shows on child, early and forced marriage in affected communities. In Cameroon, the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and the Family has established a partnership with community media to broadcast programmes against child, early and forced marriage and other harmful practices. In India, the organization Awaaz-e-Niswaan is providing a safe haven for peer-to-peer sharing between adolescent girls. In groups led by older girls, girls learn about the long-term physical and psychological impact of early marriage and early childbearing. In Mauritius, the National Children's Council undertakes campaigns in children's clubs and in "parent schools" to inform the public about the existing legislation and prevent child, early and forced marriage.

38. Awareness-raising activities have in some cases targeted at-risk women and girls and communities. In 2015, Serbia embarked on the "Responsible through life" and "Choose your own path" campaigns, aimed at raising awareness of the negative impact of child, early and forced marriage among young Roma women and children. Slovenia reported efforts in educating Roma families about the harmful consequences of child, early and forced marriage. Also in 2015, Belgium and Italy adopted a sectoral plan on Roma health that pays particular attention to the issue of child, early and forced marriage.

39. The United States Department of State is engaged in community awareness-raising on child, early and forced marriage in Benin. Germany, through the project of BMZ and the German Federal Enterprise for International Cooperation (GIZ), "Strengthening women's rights", supports the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection of Indonesia in the implementation of national campaigns to raise the minimum age of marriage. Canada, together with Girls Not Brides, has organized an exhibition entitled "Girls' voices: speaking out against child marriage". The exhibition, which was launched in 2015 at the Commonwealth Women's Forum in Malta and the African Girls' Summit in Zambia, tells untold stories of married girls and those at risk of child marriage and the community members, including religious and traditional leaders, advocating change in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia.[31]

[31] See Girls Not Brides, "Girls' voices: speaking out against child marriage", 18 November 2015. Available from www.girlsnotbrides.org/press-release-girls-voices-speaking-out-against-child-marriage/.

VIII. Protection measures and services for married girls

40. The OHCHR report and human rights mechanisms highlight the need for protection services that are mandated and adequately resourced to provide all necessary prevention and protection services to women and children who are, or are at risk of becoming, victims of child, early and forced marriage. They also stressed the importance of capacity-building programmes for government officials, the judiciary, law enforcement, teachers, health and other service workers and those working with immigrants and asylum seekers on how to identify women and children at risk or actual victims and provide the services required.[32]

41. Protection measures for girls at risk of child marriage have been included in child-specific legislation. The Child Law of 2014 of Oman establishes different committees to address violence against children and specialized shelters for children. In Jordan, the Juvenile Act makes provisions for shelters for children who may be at risk of forced marriage.

42. In some countries, specific mechanisms to monitor cases of violence against children and prevent child, early and forced marriage have been established. For example, in Azerbaijan during the period 2014-2015, the children and family support centres acting in 11 regions discovered 20 cases of child marriages, of which 17 were prevented. In Cameroon, civil society organizations put in place "denunciation brigades" in the far north of the country. With the engagement of communities, they tracked cases of impending child, early and forced marriage and negotiated to prevent those and provide support to concerned families. The Forced Marriage Unit of the United Kingdom gave advice or support related to possible forced marriage in 1,267 cases, of which 79 per cent involved female victims and 21 per cent involved male victims. To date, it has issued more than 800 Forced Marriage Protection Orders to prevent people from being forced into a marriage and to assist in repatriating victims. The figures were not disaggregated by age.

43. Some countries reported on efforts to train professionals who could detect cases of child, early and forced marriage and provide, or make referrals to, necessary services. For example, in Belgium in June 2015, a guide addressed to professionals has been published by the Institute for the Equality of Women and Men in cooperation with the Network on Marriage and Migration and disseminated to personnel in schools, psychosocial services and the police, among others.[33] Further capacity-building was foreseen for officers in civil registration to allow them to detect signs of possible forced marriages. Justice Canada, in partnership with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and Global Affairs Canada, provides training on these issues to front-line police officers, border officers and other service providers. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada has implemented a number of administrative measures, including operational guidelines to officers on how to address cases of forced marriage. Terre des Femmes reported that in 2014 and 2015, the Equal Opportunities representative of the district of Neukoelln, Friedrichshain-Kreuzberg, in Berlin, disseminated letters to schools to raise

[32] CEDAW/C/GC/31-CRC/C/GC/18, para. 87, and A/HRC/26/22, paras. 37-40 and 54 (h).

[33] Michel Pasteel, ed., "Mariage forcé? Guide à l'usage des professionnel-le-s" (Brussels, Institute for the Equality of Women and Men, 2015). Available from http://igvm-iefh.belgium.be/fr/publications/gedwongen_huwelijk_handleiding_voor_dienstverleners.

awareness among teachers and students of possible forced marriages of female students during the summer school holidays.

44. There was limited information on programmes and support to already married women and girls. Save the Children, working with its partners, is providing referral services to address the specific needs of girls in Somaliland who are already married, in particular in the areas of reproductive health services and educational and vocational skills training. In Cameroon, the centres for the advancement of women and the family and social centres are in charge of psychosocial assistance for victims of child, early and forced marriage.

IX. Gaps in legislation and policies

45. While available information and analysis shows continued efforts to strengthen the legal frameworks to address child, early and forced marriage, including by raising the minimum legal age of marriage and prohibiting the practice, the challenges identified in section VII of the OHCHR report persist.

46. In States' submissions received for the present report, it was acknowledged that there persisted differences in the legal age of marriage for girls and boys and discrepancies in marriage provisions in plural legal systems, where lower ages were often allowed for customary or religious marriages. Bangladesh, for example, sets the minimum age of marriage for girls at 18 years and 21 years for men in its Child Marriage Restraint Act, but it also has a Special Marriage Act in force, which provides that the age of marriage for girls is 14 years. In addition, it has the Muslim Family Laws Ordinance 1961, which sets the age of marriage of a girl at 16 years, while the Christian Marriage Act refers to any person under the age of 21 years as a child and the Hindu Marriage Registration Act does not specify a minimum age of marriage.[34] In its submission, Lebanon acknowledged that its personal laws governing legal procedures on such matters as age of marriage, divorce and inheritance for different religious groups were not in line with international norms[35] and stated that a new bill before Parliament since the end of 2014 would address current challenges if adopted.

47. Information received for the present report also indicates that, in most countries, exceptions to minimum age requirements are granted, in some cases without full compliance with existing guarantees. The absence of systematic free and compulsory marriage and birth registration, including registration of customary and religious marriages, continues to represent a challenge in the implementation of existing legislation.

48. Beyond specific legislation on the age of marriage and the prohibition of child, early and forced marriage, information on efforts to eliminate discriminatory provisions in such areas as access to land, inheritance, nationality, marriage, divorce, custody and eliminating legal obstacles to access sexual and reproductive health services was limited. Such measures are crucial to both preventing child,

[34] Shabina Begum and Dawson Cornwell, "Ending early and forced marriage: Bangladesh and United Kingdom perspective" (January 2016).

[35] In its submission, Lebanon listed different marriage ages for different religious groups, with marriages in some religious groups for girls who have reached puberty as young as 12 and a half with parental consent or with a waiver from the court.

early and forced marriage and protecting and empowering women and girls already in a marriage.

49. In terms of policies, the submissions did not include many examples of efforts to comprehensively link the eradication of child, early and forced marriage to the promotion of girls' and women's rights and agency. Information on programmes on women's economic empowerment and access to productive resources was scarce. Initiatives to strengthen women's and girls' capacity to claim and exercise their rights in relation to marriage also appeared to be limited in number. More progress is needed in ensuring access to quality education for girls, including those already in a marriage and those who are pregnant or had children.[36] Few examples were provided of efforts to meaningfully address the intersections between the causes and consequences of child, early and forced marriage and the realization of sexual and reproductive health and rights. For instance, few initiatives towards providing comprehensive, evidence-based, non-discriminatory sexuality education were reported. In addition, there were few references to removing legal and other obstacles to ensure access by women and children, including those already in a marriage, to adequate, confidential and adolescent-friendly sexual and reproductive health information and services. Moreover, there seems to be insufficient investment in challenging social norms and stereotypes related to women's sexuality that result in social support for child, early and forced marriage, often as a means to maintain "honour".

50. Only a few submissions referred to efforts to promote and support the roles of individuals providing services for women and children, including teachers and medical personnel, in identifying actual and potential victims of child, early and forced marriage. In addition, there was little information on efforts to ensure the protection of women and children fleeing the risk of being subjected to child, early and forced marriage or being persecuted as a result.

51. The paucity of information on efforts to ensure legal remedies, support and rehabilitation services and social and economic opportunities for already married women and children makes it particularly challenging to assess progress in this regard.

52. Only one country[37] submitted information with regard to budget allocations to address child, early and forced marriage at the national level; several indicated that funding was allocated through development cooperation. Establishing or strengthening accountability mechanisms at the national level on the issue of child, early and forced marriage appeared not to be a focus in most countries.

X. Progress and gaps in research

53. Systematic collection of data disaggregated by sex, age, geographic location, socioeconomic status, education level and other key factors, as well as qualitative research, is central to the identification of those particularly at risk and to monitoring and assessing the impact of policies and initiatives to eliminate child, early and forced marriage.

[36] A/HRC/26/22, para. 50.

[37] Serbia.

54. While the lack of systematic collection of disaggregated data appears to remain a challenge in many countries, several submissions referred to research on the manifestations, causes and consequences of child, early and forced marriage. In 2014, the Department for Equal Opportunities of Italy published a report on child, early and forced marriage that highlighted difficulties in detecting child, early and forced marriage, especially among women and girls from the Roma community. In response to the recommendations of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, in 2014 Slovenia commissioned empirical research on child, early and forced marriage among Roma children. The International Centre for Reproductive Health reported on research in Belgium in 2015 showing that child, early and forced marriage was particularly prevalent among both newly arrived migrants from ethnic minorities and those residing in the country of destination for a long period and that the Roma and the Afghan communities were particularly affected by early marriage.

55. In 2015, the American Jewish World Service, in partnership with Nirantar Trust, undertook a mapping of child and early marriage in India, which confirmed linkages between insecurity and the practice, including among internally displaced communities. It also found that conservative gender norms and anxieties relating to family honour were among the root causes of child, early and forced marriage. In Cameroon, a national study on child, early and forced marriage was conducted in 2014 by the University of Maroua in collaboration with the Association de lutte contre les violences faites aux femmes. The results showed that 70 per cent of child marriages concerned girls between the ages of 13 and 15 years. Another study conducted in Cameroon in 2014 by the Minister of Women's Empowerment and the Family with the support of Plan International Cameroon focused on the root causes and sociocultural determinants of child, early and forced marriage in the south-west of the country.

56. Increasingly, research has been devoted to the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage in Latin America. In July 2015, the Inter-American Development Bank issued a report on child marriage in Latin America and the Caribbean that identified families' exertion of control over girls' sexuality, response to early pregnancy, or family honour and financial support for girls and their children after early pregnancy as the root causes and factors contributing to the prevalence of child marriage in the region.[38] Brazil has the fourth highest absolute number of girls who are married by the age of 15. Some research in Guatemala indicates that 9 out of 10 girls drop out of school owing to early pregnancy. In its submission, Peru highlighted economic reasons, lack of access to information and inadequate reproductive health rights and services as contributing to the high levels of early informal unions.

57. In the context of research on the economic impacts of child marriage, the World Bank and the International Center for Research on Women are examining three high-prevalence countries, namely Ethiopia, the Niger and Nepal. Their initial findings indicate that the economic impacts of child marriage are significant. In the

[38] Margaret E. Greene, Giovanna Lauro and Alice Taylor, "Yes, girls do marry as children and adolescents in Latin America", 9 July 2015. Available from http://blogs.iadb.org/y-si-hablamos-de-igualdad/2015/07/09/yes-child-marriage-algo-exists-in-latin-america/.

Niger alone, the costs are estimated to amount to more than $25 billion between now and 2030.[39]

58. Efforts to assess the impact of programmes and initiatives to address child, early and forced marriage are intensifying, although more research is needed in this regard. The United States Agency for International Development has undertaken research into the effectiveness of programmes to delay child, early and forced marriage in Burkina Faso, Ethiopia and the United Republic of Tanzania. The United Kingdom reported that it was funding the Global Girls Research Initiative to generate new evidence on effective avenues to reduce discrimination against girls and enable them to transition out of poverty. The research is expected to inform the policies and programming of national Governments, international agencies and civil society organizations on the issue. A recent evaluation by the International Center for Research on Women of the Haryana State programme Apni Beti Apna Dhan ("our daughters, our wealth") in India found that conditional cash transfers in the context of child marriage increased the likelihood of girls marrying immediately upon reaching the age of 18 when families were eligible to receive the cash transfer, which was then used as dowry. Girls Not Brides research and lessons learned on national strategies to end child, early and forced marriage in four countries found that there was momentum, as well as high levels of political will, but that such initiatives needed to be broadened beyond children and gender ministries to other ministries.

59. Some research has been undertaken on the causes and impacts of child marriage in the context of humanitarian and conflict settings. Child marriages among refugees living in Jordan increased from 12 per cent in 2011 to 32 per cent in 2015.[40] According to Save the Children, reasons for child marriage among Syrian refugees in Jordan include the parents' desire to protect their girl children from general insecurity in refugee camps, to preserve their daughters' and their family's honour and to escape poverty.

60. Efforts to understand the determinants of child, early and forced marriage in different contexts should continue paying attention to specific communities and groups that may be at heightened risk. In this regard, more research is needed on how children and young people with disabilities are affected by child marriage. More attention should be paid to assessing whether initiatives to prevent and address child, early and forced marriage are effective and their impact on the lives and rights of women and girls in targeted countries and communities. For instance, the impact of legislation criminalizing child marriages, the linkages between girls' engagement in paid work and economic empowerment initiatives and delaying marriage and the impact of awareness-raising and capacity-building efforts in preventing marriage should be further researched.

[39] Quentin Wodon and others, "Economic impacts of child marriage: preliminary finding from analyses of existing data", research brief, November 2015. Available from www.costsofchildmarriage.org/#sthash.5R6ASy9o.dpuf.

[40] UNICEF, "A study on early marriage in Jordan 2014" (Amman, 2014), available from www.unicef.org/jordan/UNICEFJordan_EarlyMarriageStudy2014-E_COPY_.pdf; CARE International, "Girls not brides: increase in child marriages among Syrians stranded inside and outside of the country", 28 December 2015, available from http://reliefweb.int/report/jordan/girls-not-brides-increase-child-marriages-among-syrians-stranded-inside-and-outside.

XI. Conclusions and recommendations

61. Data estimates point to a slow decline in the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage globally, with the biggest reduction in marriages under the age of 15. In parallel, however, conflict and humanitarian emergencies have resulted in an increase in child, early and forced marriage, with reports of high rates of marriage among girls in refugee camps.[41]

62. In the short period covered by the present report, growing momentum for the elimination of child, early and forced marriage was observed at the international, regional and national levels. At the international level, the recognition of the eradication of child, early and forced marriage as a development and a human rights priority is exemplified by the inclusion of a specific target in the Sustainable Development Goals and the increasing attention devoted to the issue by international and regional human rights mechanisms.

63. A growing body of evidence on the prevalence of child, early and forced marriage has led to a greater understanding of its causes and social and health impacts. In addition, guidance on the preventative, protection and redress measures that States should take to meet their human rights obligations to address child, early and forced marriage has been developed. Initiatives to address the practice have reportedly multiplied at the national and regional levels, although it is too early to provide a conclusive assessment of their impact.

64. Going forward, efforts to further progress towards the elimination of the practice need to be sustained. Successfully tackling child, early and forced marriage requires moving beyond small-scale initiatives towards well-defined, rights-based and locally relevant holistic strategies that are based on evidence and include legal and policy measures combined with commensurate political commitment and accountability at all levels. Such strategies need to take into account the wider sociolegal context in which child, early and forced marriage occurs and move beyond a narrow focus on protection to prioritize approaches that empower women and girls and promote their human rights, autonomy and choice in all aspects of their lives. Holistic strategies require adequate human, technical and financial resources and should be coordinated both vertically (at the local, regional and national levels and with traditional and religious authorities) and horizontally (across such sectors as education, health, justice, social welfare, law enforcement, immigration and asylum). The active involvement of women, girls and adolescents and civil society organizations in the design, implementation and evaluation of strategies to address child, early and forced marriage is crucial to making them relevant, sustainable and effective. There should also be independent mechanisms to track progress in addressing child, early and forced marriage and provide redress.

65. National averages can hide the reality of those in particularly marginalized and vulnerable situations. Specific hotspots within high-prevalence countries need to be identified so that Governments can tailor and target their responses to reach the most marginalized and those at greatest risk of child, early and forced marriage. Solid measurement, evaluation and learning, including consistent data

[41] UNICEF, *The State of the World's Children 2015: Executive Summary* (see footnote 3).

collection and disaggregation, are needed to identify those hotspots and vulnerable populations and to assess progress and trends.

66. **The expert group meeting to be organized by OHCHR before the thirty-fourth session of the Human Rights Council, pursuant to Council resolution 29/8, represents an important opportunity to review and discuss the impact of existing strategies and make additional recommendations to guide efforts towards the elimination of child, early and forced marriage. I encourage all relevant stakeholders to sustain the existing momentum and to work towards a future when not only is marriage delayed, but the choices of girls and women are expanded beyond marriage.**